



Germany No. 1 (1939)

FINAL REPORT BY
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
SIR NEVILE HENDERSON
G.C.M.G.
ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO
THE TERMINATION OF HIS MISSION
TO BERLIN

September 20, 1939

*Presented by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs
to Parliament by Command of His Majesty*

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SEPTEMBER 20, 1939.

My Lord,

London, September 20, 1939.

EVENTS moved with such rapidity during the last fortnight of my mission to Berlin that it proved impossible at the time to give any consecutive account of them. If I have the honour to do so now, while the facts are still fresh in my memory, it is with the hope that such an account may be both of immediate interest to your Lordship and serve a purpose from the point of view of historical accuracy.

2. Nevertheless, it is not these last minute manœuvres which have the real importance, except in so far as they confirm the principles and demonstrate the methods and technique of Herr Hitler and of Nazism. A brief description of the background to August 1939 is consequently indispensable, if the events of the last few weeks are to be visualised in their proper perspective.

3. Herr Hitler and National Socialism are the products of the defeat of a great nation in war and its reaction against the confusion and distress which followed that defeat. National Socialism itself is a revolution and a conception of national philosophy. Contrary to democracy which implies the subordination of the State to the service of its citizens, Nazism prescribes the subordination of its citizens to the service of the State, an all embracing Moloch, and to the individual who rules that State.

4. So long as National Socialism remained an article for internal consumption, the outside world, according to its individual predilection, might criticise or sympathise or merely watch with anxiety. The government of Germany was the affair of the German people. It was not until the theory of German nationalism was extended beyond Germany's own frontiers that the Nazi philosophy exceeded the limits compatible with peace.

5. It would be idle to deny the great achievements of the man who restored to the German nation its self-respect and its disciplined orderliness. The tyrannical methods which were employed within Germany itself to obtain this result were detestable, but were Germany's own concern. Many of Herr Hitler's social reforms, in spite of their complete disregard of personal liberty of thought, word or deed, were on highly advanced democratic lines. The "Strength through Joy" movement, the care for the physical fitness of the nation, and, above all, the organisation of the labour camps, an idea which Herr Hitler once told me that he had borrowed from Bulgaria,

are typical examples of a benevolent dictatorship. Nor can the appeal of Nazism with its slogans so attractive to a not over-discerning youth be ignored. Much of its legislation in this respect will survive in a newer and better world, in which Germany's amazing power of organisation and the great contributions which she has made in the past to the sciences, music, literature and the higher aims of civilisation and humanity will again play a leading part.

6. Nor was the unity of Great Germany in itself an ignoble ideal. It had long been the dream of some of the highest-minded of German thinkers, and it must be remembered that even in 1914 Germany was still immature as a political concept. In spite of the potential political danger for its weaker neighbours of a national philosophy which could so easily be distorted and extended beyond its due and legitimate frontiers, the unity of Great Germany was a reality which had to be faced, no less than that other reality, the paramount economic importance of Germany in Eastern, Central and South-Eastern Europe. It was not the incorporation of Austria and the Sudeten Germans in the Reich which so much shocked public opinion in the world as the unscrupulous and hateful methods which Herr Hitler employed to precipitate an incorporation which would probably have peacefully come in due course of its own volition and in accordance with the established principle of self-determination.

7. Yet even those methods might have been endured in a world which had experienced 1914-1918 and which sought peace as an end in itself, if Herr Hitler had been willing to accord to others the rights which he claimed for Germany. Revolutions are like avalanches, which once set in motion cannot stop till they crash to destruction at the appointed end of their career. History alone will determine whether Herr Hitler could have diverted Nazism into normal channels, whether he was the victim of the movement which he had initiated, or whether it was his own megalomania which drove it beyond the limits which civilisation was prepared to tolerate.

8. Be that as it may, the true background to the events of August 1939 was the occupation of Prague on the 15th March of this year, the callous destruction thereby of the hard and newly-won liberty of a free and independent people and Herr Hitler's deliberate violation by this act of the Munich Agreement which he had signed not quite six months before. In 1939, as in 1914, the origin of war with Germany has been due to the deliberate tearing up by the latter of a scrap of paper. To the iniquities of a system which employed the barbarism of the middle ages in its persecution of the Jews, which subjected Roman Catholic priests and Protestant pastors alike to the inhumanities of the concentration camp for obedience to their religious faith, and which crushed out, in a fashion unparalleled in history, all individual liberty within the State itself, was added the violation not only of international agreements freely negotiated, but also of that principle of self-determination which Herr Hitler had

invoked with such insistence so long as it suited his own purpose to do so. Up to last March the German ship of State had flown the German national flag, and in spite of the "sickening technique" of Nazism it was difficult not to concede to Germany the right both to control her own destiny and to benefit from those principles which were accorded to others. On the 15th March, by the ruthless suppression of the freedom of the Czechs, its captain hoisted the skull and crossbones of the pirate, cynically discarded his own theory of racial purity and appeared under his true colours as an unprincipled menace to European peace and liberty.

9. Two of the less attractive characteristics of the German are his inability either to see any side of a question except his own, or to understand the meaning of moderation. It would have been understandable to argue that a hostile Bohemia in the centre of Germany was an untenable proposition. But Herr Hitler could see no mean between rendering the Czechs innocuous as a potential enemy and destroying their liberty as an independent people. There is some surprising reason to believe that Herr Hitler himself was disagreeably and literally astonished at the reaction in Britain and the world generally, which was provoked by the occupation of Prague and his breach of faith with Mr. Chamberlain. But while he may have realised his tactical mistake, it did not deter him from prosecuting his further designs.

10. As I had reported to your Lordship, at the beginning of the year Germany's immediate objectives, apart from the complete political and economic domination of Czecho-Slovakia and the eventual restoration of German colonies, were Danzig and Memel. Herr Hitler felt that it would not add much to the general execration of his aggression and ill-faith in March if he settled these two problems simultaneously with Prague. The Democracies were, he thought, so averse to war that they would accept any *fait accompli*. They would be less disturbed if everything was done at once. Thereafter, the agitation would, he anticipated, gradually subside until, after consolidating his gains, he was once more in a position to strike again.

11. With this plan in view the Lithuanian Government was at once browbeaten into surrendering Memel. The same method was employed at Warsaw, but the Poles were made of sterner stuff. Negotiations had been proceeding ever since Munich for a settlement of the Danzig and the Corridor question. After Prague Herr Hitler decided that they must be abruptly concluded, and Herr von Ribbentrop peremptorily dictated to the Polish Ambassador the terms which Herr Hitler would be pleased to impose on the Polish Government. The reply of the latter was given on the 26th March and constituted a refusal to accept a Dictate, while expressing readiness to continue free and equal discussion. Alarmed at the threatening attitude adopted by the German Government in

consequence of this refusal, the Polish Government mobilised part of its forces (the German army was already largely mobilised), and the British guarantee to Poland was given on the 31st March.

12. The Ides of March constituted in fact the parting of the ways and were directly responsible for everything which happened thereafter. Thenceforward no small nation in Europe could feel itself secure from some new adaptation of Nazi racial superiority and jungle law. The Polish guarantee was followed by unilateral guarantees on Britain's part to Greece and Roumania as well as by an attempt on the part of the British and French Governments to induce the U.S.S.R. to join in a peace front against aggression, ill-faith and oppression. The Nazi Government, for its part and with considerable success in Germany, represented this attempt as a renewal of the alleged pre-war British policy of encirclement. As a war-cry for the German people it was exceedingly effective up to the signature of the Russo-German non-aggression pact on the 23rd August. The rest of Nazi propaganda was on two entirely contradictory lines either of which was destined, according to the development of the situation, to serve Herr Hitler's purpose. The first spread the persistent report that Britain would never go to war for the sake of Danzig. It was calculated to undermine the confidence of the Poles and to shake the faith of the smaller Powers, as well as of the United States of America, in the determination of Britain to resist any further German aggression. The second represented Britain as resolved to make war at the first opportunity on Germany in any case and in order to crush her before she became a too formidable political and economic rival. Both were fallacies but the Germans are a credulous race and, since the first has failed, it is the latter argumentation which forms the basis of Germany's present war propaganda.

13. Up to the beginning of August, though the clouds were black and the peace front negotiations dragged on interminably, the situation remained serious but not immediately dangerous. Instead, however, of there being any sign of a relaxation of tension at Danzig the position there had gradually become more and more strained. From the end of March till the end of August all personal contact between Warsaw and Berlin was suspended. The remilitarisation of the Free City, alleged by the Germans to be purely defensive, but no less adaptable for offensive purposes, had proceeded apace, and other measures had been taken indicative of a German intention to effect a sudden coup there. The Poles for their part, in view of the great increase in arms smuggling, had been obliged to strengthen their customs inspectors by a number of frontier guards. They had also taken certain economic counter-measures of a nature to prejudice the trade of the Free City.

14. What was, however, even more ominous were the extensive preparations which were being made by the Germans for the

twenty-fifth celebration of the battle of Tannenberg on the 27th August, and a German warship was scheduled to visit Danzig at the same time and ostensibly for the same purpose. Early in July I drew your Lordship's attention to the menace involved by these equivocal preparations, which corresponded so closely to Hitler's usual technique of preparing for all eventualities, under cover of a plausible excuse.

15. The first mutterings of the storm were heard on the 4th August. At four posts on the Danzig-East Prussian frontier, the Polish Customs Inspectors were informed that they would not be permitted henceforward to carry out their duties. Alarmed at the gradual sapping of Polish rights and interests in the Free City, the Polish Commissioner General there was at once instructed to deliver a note to the Danzig Senate, warning the latter that the Polish Government would react in the strongest manner if the work of the inspectors was interfered with. The Senate subsequently denied that it had issued any instructions to the effect alleged but the German Government replied to what it described as the Polish ultimatum by a verbal note, which was handed by the State Secretary to the Polish Chargé d'Affaires at Berlin on the 9th August. The Polish Government was therein warned that any further demand addressed to the Free City in the nature of an ultimatum or containing threats of reprisals, would at once lead to an aggravation of Polish-German relations, the responsibility for which would fall on the Polish Government. The latter retorted on the following day by a similar verbal note, denying the judicial right of Germany to intervene in the affairs between Poland and the Free City, and warning in its turn the German Government that "any future intervention by the latter to the detriment of Polish rights and interests at Danzig would be considered as an act of aggression."

16. I have little doubt but that the latter phrase served more than anything else to produce that final brainstorm in Herr Hitler's mind on which the peace of the world depended, and upon which it always must have depended so long as the fate not only of Germany but also of Europe, rested in the hands of a single irresponsible individual.

17. The tragedy of any dictator is that as he goes on, his entourage steadily and inexorably deteriorates. For lack of freedom of utterance he loses the services of the best men. All opposition becomes intolerable to him. All those, therefore, who are bold enough to express opinions contrary to his views are shed one by one, and he is in the end surrounded by mere yes-men, whose flattery and counsels are alone endurable to him. In my report on the events of 1938 I drew your Lordship's special attention to the far reaching and unfortunate results of the Blomberg marriage. I am more than ever convinced of the major disaster which that—in itself—minor incident involved, owing to the consequent elimination from

Herr Hitler's entourage of the more moderate and independent of his advisers, such as Field Marshal von Blomberg himself, Baron von Neurath, Generals Fritsch, Beck, &c. After February of last year Herr Hitler became more and more shut off from external influences and a law unto himself.

18. People are apt, in my opinion, to exaggerate the malign influence of Herr von Ribbentrop, Dr. Goebbels, Herr Himmler and the rest. It was probably consistently sinister, not because of its suggestiveness (since Herr Hitler alone decided policy), nor because it merely applauded and encouraged, but because, if Herr Hitler appeared to hesitate, the extremists of the party at once proceeded to fabricate situations calculated to drive Herr Hitler into courses which even he at times shrank from risking. The simplest method of doing this was through the medium of a controlled Press. Thus what happened in September last year, was repeated in March this year, and again in August. Dr. Goebbels' propaganda machine was the ready tool of these extremists, who were afraid lest Herr Hitler should move too slowly in the prosecution of his own ultimate designs.

19. The 1938 stories of Czech atrocities against its German minority, were rehashed up almost verbatim in regard to the Poles. Some foundation there must necessarily have been for a proportion of these allegations in view of the state of excitable tension which existed between the two peoples. Excess of zeal on the part of individuals and minor officials there undoubtedly was—but the tales of ill-treatment, expropriation and murder were multiplied a hundredfold. How far Herr Hitler himself believed in the truth of these tales must be a matter for conjecture. Germans are prone in any case to convince themselves very readily of anything which they wish to believe. Certainly he behaved as if he did believe, and, even if one may give him the benefit of the doubt, these reports served to inflame his resentment to the pitch which he or his extremists desired.

20. Until the 8th August the campaign against the Poles had been relegated to the more discreet pages of the German press. Up to that date, public enemy No. 1 had been Great Britain and the alleged policy of encirclement. From that date, however, the stories of Polish atrocities began to take the leading place, and by the 17th August the campaign was in full swing.

21. Herr Hitler is a master of turning events to suit his own purpose, and the so-called ultimatum to the Danzig Senate of the 4th August and the subsequent foreign press comments on a Danzig "climb down" gave him the opportunity which he was seeking. The Polish note of the 9th August provided an excuse for the German *note verbale* of the 10th August, which provoked in its turn the Polish reply of the 10th August. In the midst of these exchanges Dr. Burkhardt, High Commissioner of the League of Nations for Danzig flew to Berchtesgaden in a last effort to place the position at

Danzig on a more satisfactory footing. He saw Herr Hitler on the 11th August, while Count Ciano and Herr von Ribbentrop were meeting at Salzburg.

22. Intransigent as he appears to have been at his interview with Dr. Burckhardt, there is little doubt in my mind that Herr Hitler would have been far more so had he at the time been in possession of the text of the final paragraph of the Polish reply of 10th August, which had only been communicated to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs at Berlin on that day. He was aware of it, however, when Count Ciano visited him at Berchtesgaden immediately after Dr. Burckhardt's departure, and it undoubtedly rendered unavailing the Italian Foreign Minister's laudable intention of pouring oil on the troubl'd waters. Once again, as in 1938, the inexorable fatality of the Greek tragedy was in evidence, and the coincidence of the Polish note of the 10th August with the Ciano visit was a striking example of it. Count Ciano returned to Italy and a day or so later the Italian Ambassador at Berlin was hurriedly summoned to Rome.

23. Herr Hitler's carefully calculated patience was, in fact, exhausted, and on the 18th August I telegraphed to your Lordship that I had come to the definite conclusion that, if peace was to be preserved, the present situation could not be allowed to continue and that the only alternative to war must be some immediate and mediatory action. In this connexion I repeated a suggestion which I had made some time previously, namely, that a personal letter should be addressed by the Prime Minister to Herr Hitler and be delivered by some emissary from London. Two days later I again telegraphed to the same effect, and stated my conviction that Herr Hitler had now finally decided upon some form of immediate action which would force the issue. I drew attention at the same time to the increased German military strength which had been assembled in East Prussia under cover of the Tannenberg anniversary and expressed my apprehension lest that celebration might prove the starting point for the action which Herr Hitler contemplated. I have little doubt but that such was Herr Hitler's original and premeditated intention.

24. On the 21st August information reached me that the long expected but carefully concealed German military concentrations were already in progress, and that instructions had been given to complete them by the 24th August. A report which reached me at that time actually mentioned the 25th August as the date fixed for the German advance into Poland.

25. I shall return to this point later, but I must here refer to the bombshell which was exploded late in the evening of the 21st August by the announcement that negotiations had been concluded for the signature of a Russo-German non-aggression pact and that Herr von Ribbentrop would fly to Moscow on the 23rd to sign it.

26. The secret, which on the German side had been known to not more than a few persons, had been well kept. It had been realised that German counter-negotiations had been proceeding throughout the summer, but it was hoped that they had been abandoned after the actual arrival at Moscow of the French and British military missions. Comment on the subject is, however, outside the scope of this report, except in so far as it concerns the effect of this announcement on the German public. The first impression in Berlin was one of immense relief, partly at the removal of the dreaded Russian air menace, but more particularly because, in the minds of a public which had been led to believe by Goebbels propaganda that the British negotiations with the U.S.S.R. were really encirclement with a view to a preventive war, the conclusion of a Russo-German non-aggression pact meant that peace was assured, since Britain would not, it was told, fight for Danzig or Poland without Russian aid. Once more the faith of the German people in the ability of Herr Hitler to obtain his objective without war was reaffirmed. Its satisfaction was, however, short-lived and the deception considerable when it was realised that Britain's word to Poland did not depend on Russian support. Those who had fought the war of nazism against communism were furthermore puzzled by this complete *volte-face*. The Nazi theory of racial purity had been discarded in March and in August a second of its basic principles was thus equally relegated to the scrap-heap. To most Germans the old hereditary enemy is Russia, nor was their confidence in the sincerity of her good intentions towards Germany greatly fortified by this exhibition of Russian ill-faith towards the Western Democracies. Nevertheless, as a diplomatic *coup*, the Russo-German pact was a strikingly successful and surprising one. It is devoutly to be hoped that it may prove as Pyrrhic as are most diplomatic victories.

27. At the moment when Herr von Ribbentrop was preparing to fly to Moscow, I received shortly before 9 p.m. on the 22nd August your Lordship's instructions to convey without delay a personal letter from the Prime Minister to Herr Hitler. I at once got into communication with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and in the course of the night an interview was arranged for the following day. I left Berlin at 9.30 on the morning of the 23rd August accompanied by the State Secretary and Herr Hewel, in an aeroplane provided for me by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

28. I reached Salzburg about midday and I had my first audience with Herr Hitler at Berchtesgaden at 1 p.m. on the 23rd August in the presence of Baron von Weizsäcker and Herr Hewel. The correspondence, including the text of the Prime Minister's letter, of Herr Hitler's reply and my own telegraphic record of my two conversations with the Chancellor, is to be found in the Blue Book presented to Parliament and publishing the documents concerning German-Polish relations and the outbreak of hostilities between Great Britain and Germany on the 3rd September, 1939.⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ See Cmd. 6106, Nos. 56, 57, 58, 60.

29. I need not say more here than that the three main points of the Prime Minister's letter were (1) insistence on the determination of His Majesty's Government to fulfil their obligations to Poland; (2) their readiness, if a peace atmosphere could be created, to discuss all the problems at issue between our two countries, and (3) their anxiety, during a period of truce, to see immediate direct discussion initiated between Germany and Poland in regard to the reciprocal treatment of minorities.

30. In Herr Hitler's reply of the 28th August he declared that Great Britain's determination to support Poland could not modify his policy as expressed in the German verbal note to the Polish Government of the 9th August that he was prepared to accept even a long war rather than sacrifice German national interests and honour, and that, if Great Britain persisted in her own measures of mobilisation, he would at once order the mobilisation of the whole of the German forces.

31. At my first interview with him on that day, Herr Hitler was in a mood of extreme excitability. His language as regards the Poles and British responsibility for the Polish attitude was violent, recriminatory and exaggerated. He referred, for instance, to 100,000 German refugees from Poland, a figure which was at least five times greater than the reality. Again I cannot say whether he was persuaded or persuaded himself of the reality of these figures. At my second interview, when he handed me his reply, he had recovered his calm but was not less uncompromising. No longer, he told me, did he trust Mr. Chamberlain. He preferred war, he said, when he was 50 to when he was 55 or 60. He had himself always sought and believed in the possibility of friendship with England. He now realised, he said, that those who had argued the contrary had been right and nothing short of a complete change in British policy towards Germany could ever convince him of any sincere British desire for good relations. My last remark to him was that I could only deduce from his language that my mission to Germany had failed and that I bitterly regretted it.

32. I flew back from Berchtesgaden to Berlin the same evening. I had in fact little hope that either the Prime Minister's letter or my own language to Herr Hitler, however direct and straightforward, would give him pause. The Russian pact had, I felt, created in his opinion a situation which was favourable to his designs and I believed his mind to be definitely made up. Though he spoke of his artistic tastes and of his longing to satisfy them, I derived the impression that the corporal of the last war was even more anxious to prove what he could do as a conquering Generalissimo in the next.

33. Nevertheless the visit to Berchtesgaden may after all have postponed the disaster for a week. Herr von Ribbentrop flew back to Germany with the signed Russo-German Agreement and Herr

Hitler returned to Berlin the night of the 24th August. I have some reason to believe—though I cannot confirm it—that the order for the German Army to advance into Poland was actually issued for the night of the 25th–26th August. It is difficult otherwise to find justification for the various orders and arrangements which came into force on the 26th and 27th August. In the afternoon of the 25th August itself all telephone communication between Berlin and London and Paris was unexpectedly cut off for several hours. The celebrations at Tannenberg were cancelled on the 26th and the Party Rally at Nuremberg on the 27th August; all Naval, Military and Air Attachés at Berlin were refused permission to leave the city without prior authority being obtained from the Ministry of War. All German airports were closed from that date, and the whole of Germany became a prohibited zone for all aircraft except the regular civil lines. All internal German air services were also suspended. Moreover as from the 27th a system for the rationing of food-stuffs and other commodities throughout Germany came into force. That this latter and—for the public—depressing measure should have been adopted prior to the outbreak of war can scarcely be explained, except on the assumption that war should actually have broken out on the 26th August.

34. The fact may well be, as I imagine it was, that Herr Hitler had had in consequence of the Prime Minister's letter one last hesitation and countermanded the orders to his Army, whereas the other arrangements were allowed to proceed unchecked. But it was not the horrors of war which deterred him. He had unlimited confidence in the magnificent army and air force which he had re-created and he was certainly not averse to putting them to the test so far as Poland was concerned. In two months, he told me, the war in the East would be ended and he would then, he said, hurl 160 divisions against the Western Front if England was so unwise as to oppose his plans. His hesitation was due rather to one final effort to detach Britain from Poland. Be that as it may, at about 12·45 on the 25th August, I received a message to the effect that Herr Hitler wished to receive me at the Chancellery at 1·30 P.M. At that meeting he made to me the verbal communication which is recorded in the Blue Book.(2)

35. Briefly put, Herr Hitler's proposals therein dealt with two groups of questions: (a) the immediate necessity of a settlement of the dispute between Germany and Poland, and (b) an eventual offer of friendship or alliance between Germany and Great Britain. My interview with Herr Hitler, at which Herr von Ribbentrop and Dr. Schmidt were also present, lasted on this occasion over an hour. The Chancellor spoke with calm and apparent sincerity. He described his proposals as a last effort, for conscience sake, to secure good relations with Great Britain, and he suggested that I should fly to

London myself with them. I told his Excellency that, while I was fully prepared to consider this course, I felt it my duty to tell him quite clearly that my country could not possibly go back on its word to Poland, and that, however anxious we were for a better understanding with Germany, we could never reach one except on the basis of a negotiated settlement with Poland.

86. Whatever may have been the underlying motive of this final gesture on the part of the Chancellor, it was one which could not be ignored, and, with your Lordship's consent, I flew to London early the following morning (26th August), on a German plane which was courteously put at my disposal. Two days were spent by His Majesty's Government in giving the fullest and most careful consideration to Herr Hitler's message, and on the afternoon of the 28th August I flew back to Berlin with their reply.⁽³⁾ Therein, while the obligations of His Majesty's Government to Poland were reaffirmed, it was stated that the Polish Government were ready to enter into negotiations with the German Government for a reasonable solution of the matter in dispute on the basis of the safeguarding of Poland's essential interests, and of an international guarantee for the settlement eventually arrived at. His Majesty's Government accordingly proposed that the next step should be the initiation of direct discussions between the Polish and German Governments on that basis and the adoption of immediate steps to relieve the tension in the matter of the treatment of minorities. Furthermore, His Majesty's Government undertook to use all their influence with a view to contributing towards a solution which might be satisfactory to both parties and which would, they hoped, prepare the way for the negotiation of that wider and more complete understanding between Great Britain and Germany which both countries desired. Finally, after a reference to a limitation of armaments, His Majesty's Government pointed out that, whereas a just settlement of the Polish question might open the way to world peace, failure to do so would finally ruin the hopes of a better understanding between our countries and might well plunge the whole world into war.

87. Before continuing the record of events after my return to Berlin on the evening of the 28th August, it is necessary to give a brief account of what had happened after my meeting with the Chancellor at 1.30 on the 25th August. At 5 P.M. on that day Herr Hitler had received the French Ambassador and given him a letter for communication to M. Daladier. Its general tenour was a suggestion to France, with whom Germany was stated to have no quarrel, to abstain from further support of Poland. It received a dignified answer from the French Government, which was published on the 27th August. Appeals for peace were made at this time to both the German and Polish Governments as well as to other Powers by the Pope and the President of the United States of America. Though

⁽³⁾ *Idem* No. 74.

they received a favourable response from the Polish Government, they received scant consideration from Germany.

88. On the evening of the 25th August the Anglo-Polish Pact had been signed in London. Though it had been under negotiation for several months, its signature gave great offence to Herr Hitler, who was at first inclined to regard it as the reply of His Majesty's Government to his message to them. His immediate retort was the announcement on the morning of the 26th August that Herr Forster had been appointed Reichsoberhaupt, or Head of the State of Danzig. At the same time the German concentrations against Poland began to reach their final stage.

89. Thereafter there was a lull for two days pending my return to Germany with the reply of His Majesty's Government. I had left London at 5 p.m. on the 28th August, and at 10.30 p.m. I was received by Herr Hitler at the Chancellery and handed to him that reply, together with a German translation. I sent to your Lordship a full record of my conversation with the Chancellor the same night. (*)

40. On this occasion Herr Hitler was again friendly and reasonable and appeared to be not dissatisfied with the answer which I had brought to him. He observed, however, that he must study it carefully and would give me a written reply the next day.

41. I would mention incidentally that both that evening and the next, when I visited Herr Hitler again and was handed his reply, nothing was left undone to enhance the solemnity of the occasion. A considerable but quite expressionless crowd was waiting outside the Chancellery and a guard of honour awaited me in the courtyard of the main entrance. In view of what has been reported to the contrary, I desire to bear witness here to the fact that throughout the whole of those anxious weeks neither I nor my staff received anything but the utmost courtesy and civility from all Germans, except on one occasion to which I shall refer later.

42. Such information as reached me during the course of the day of the 29th August tended to represent the atmosphere as not unfavourable and to foreshadow Herr Hitler's readiness to open direct negotiations with the Poles. I was therefore somewhat disappointed on being summoned to the Chancellery at 7.15 that evening to find the Chancellor in a far less reasonable mood than on the previous evening. The German midday Press had reported the alleged murder of six German nationals in Poland, and this story, which was probably fabricated by the extremists in fear lest he was weakening, together with the news of the Polish general mobilisation, had probably upset him. I sensed in any case a distinctly more uncompromising attitude on Herr Hitler's part when he handed me his answer. I

(*) *Idem* No. 75.

read it through carefully, and, though it reiterated his demand for the whole Corridor as well as Danzig, I made no comment till I reached the phrase at the end of it, in which, after a grudging acquiescence in direct discussions with the Poles solely by way of proof of Germany's sincerity in her desire for lasting friendship with Great Britain, it was stated that "the German Government counted upon the arrival in Berlin of a Polish Emissary with full powers on the following day, Wednesday, the 30th August." I pointed out to his Excellency that this phrase sounded very much like an ultimatum ("hatte den Klang eines Ultimatums"). This was strenuously and heatedly denied by Herr Hitler himself, supported by Herr von Ribbentrop. According to the former this sentence merely emphasised the urgency of the moment, not only on account of the risk of incidents when two mobilised armies were standing opposite one another, but also when Germans were being massacred in Poland. In this latter connection his Excellency asserted that "I did not care how many Germans were being slaughtered in Poland." This gratuitous impugnment of the humanity of His Majesty's Government and of myself provoked a heated retort on my part and the remainder of the interview was of a somewhat stormy character.

43. It was closed, however, by a brief and in my opinion quite honest harangue on Herr Hitler's part in regard to the genuineness of his constant endeavour to win Britain's friendship, of his respect for the British Empire, and of his liking for Englishmen generally.

44. I should like to state here, parenthetically but emphatically, that Herr Hitler's constant repetition of his desire for good relations with Great Britain was undoubtedly a sincere conviction. He will prove in the future a fascinating study for the historian and the biographer with psychological leanings. Widely different explanations will be propounded, and it would be out of place and time to comment at any length in this despatch on this aspect of Herr Hitler's mentality and character. But he combined, as I fancy many Germans do, admiration for the British race with envy of their achievements and hatred of their opposition to Germany's excessive aspirations. It is no exaggeration to say that he assiduously courted Great Britain, both as representing the aristocracy and most successful of the Nordic races, and as constituting the only seriously dangerous obstacle to his own far-reaching plan of German domination in Europe. This is evident in *Mein Kampf*, and, in spite of what he regarded as the constant rebuffs which he received from the British side, he persisted in his endeavours up to the last moment. Geniuses are strange creatures, and Herr Hitler, among other paradoxes, is a mixture of long-headed calculation and violent and arrogant impulse provoked by resentment. The former drove him to seek Britain's friendship and the latter finally into war with her. Moreover, he believes his resentment to be entirely justified. He failed to realise why his military-cum-police tyranny should be repugnant to British ideals of individual and national freedom and

liberty, or why he should not be allowed a free hand in Central and Eastern Europe to subjugate smaller and, as he regards them, inferior peoples to superior German rule and culture. He believed he could buy British acquiescence in his own far-reaching schemes by offers of alliance with and guarantees for the British Empire. Such acquiescence was indispensable to the success of his ambitions and he worked unceasingly to secure it. His great mistake was his complete failure to understand the inherent British sense of morality, humanity and freedom.

45. It must be mentioned here that the concluding passage of the Chancellor's reply to His Majesty's Government had contained a statement to the effect that the German Government would immediately draw up proposals for a solution of the Polish question which it would, if possible, place at the disposal of the British Government before the arrival of the Polish negotiator.

46. I had at once telegraphed to your Lordship the text of the German note^(*), and in the early hours of the morning of the 30th August (4 A.M.) I had already conveyed to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs your interim reply, to the effect that it would be carefully considered, but observing that it would be unreasonable to expect that His Majesty's Government could produce a Polish representative at Berlin within twenty-four hours, and that the German Government must not count on this.

47. Later in the course of the day, I received three messages for communication to the German Government. The first was a personal one from the Prime Minister to the Chancellor notifying the latter of the representations made to Warsaw in regard to the avoidance of frontier incidents, and begging the German Government to take similar precautions. (I transmitted this in the afternoon to its destination in a personal letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs.) The second similarly notified the German Government of our counsels of restraint to Poland and asked for reciprocation on Germany's part. The third pointed out that the demand that a Polish Representative with full powers must come to Berlin to receive the German proposals was unreasonable and suggested that the German Government should follow the normal procedure of inviting the Polish Ambassador to call and of handing him the German proposals for transmission to Warsaw with a view to arrangements being made for the conduct of negotiations. This last communication also reminded the German Government that it had promised to communicate its detailed proposals to His Majesty's Government, who undertook, if they offered a reasonable basis, to do their best in Warsaw to facilitate negotiations. The good intentions of His Majesty's Government were, in fact, patently clear and had Herr Hitler honestly desired or preferred a pacific settlement all the arrangements to that end seemed to be in full swing.

^(*) *Idem* No. 78.

48. I had arranged to see the Minister for Foreign Affairs at 11.30 p.m. to make these communications to him. Shortly before the appointed time I received in code the considered reply of His Majesty's Government to the German Note of the 29th August.^(*) I was accordingly obliged to ask that my meeting with Herr von Ribbentrop should be postponed for half an hour, in order to give me the time to have this last message decyphered.

49. In the final passages of that communication His Majesty's Government, while fully recognising the need for speed in the initiation of discussions, urged that during the negotiations no aggressive military operations should take place on either side. They further expressed their confidence that they could secure such an undertaking from the Polish Government, if the German Government would give similar assurances. They also suggested a temporary *modus vivendi* at Danzig, such as would obviate the risk of incidents which might render German-Polish relations still more difficult.

50. I saw Herr von Ribbentrop at exactly midnight, before which hour the German Government had ostensibly counted on the arrival of a Polish emissary at Berlin. I say "ostensibly" since it seems hardly possible that it cannot have occurred to either Herr Hitler or his Minister for Foreign Affairs that it was utterly unreasonable to expect a Polish Plenipotentiary to present himself at Berlin without even knowing in advance the basis of the proposals about which he was expected to negotiate. It is conceivable that the Army Leaders had been representing to their Führer that even 24 hours' delay involved the risk of bad weather holding up the rapidity of the German advance into Poland, but, even so, it is difficult not to draw the conclusion that the proposals in themselves were but dust to be thrown in the eyes of the world with a view to its deception and were never intended to be taken seriously by the German Government itself.

51. Be that as it may, it is probable that Herr Hitler's mood in the hour when he had to decide between peace or war was not an amiable one. It was reflected in Herr von Ribbentrop, whose reception of me that evening was, from the outset, one of intense hostility, which increased in violence as I made each communication in turn. He kept leaping from his chair in a state of great excitement, and asking if I had anything more to say. I kept replying that I had, and, if my own attitude was no less unfriendly than his own, I cannot but say in all sincerity that I had every justification for it. When I told him that I would not fail to report his comments and remarks to my Government, he calmed down a little and said that they were his own, and that it was for Herr Hitler to decide. As for inviting the Polish Ambassador to come and see him, such a course would, he indignantly said, be utterly unthinkable and intolerable.

^(*) *Idem* No. 89.

52. After I had finished making my various communications to him, he produced a lengthy document which he read out to me in German, or rather gabbed through to me as fast as he could, in a tone of the utmost annoyance. Of the sixteen articles in it I was able to gather the gist of six or seven, but it would have been quite impossible to guarantee even the exact accuracy of these without a careful study of the text itself. When he had finished, I accordingly asked him to let me see it. Herr von Ribbentrop refused categorically, threw the document with a contemptuous gesture on the table and said that it was now out of date ("überholt"), since no Polish Emissary had arrived at Berlin by midnight.

53. I observed that in that case the sentence in the German note of the 29th August to which I had drawn his and his Führer's attention on the preceding evening had, in fact, constituted an ultimatum in spite of their categorical denials. Herr von Ribbentrop's answer to that was that the idea of an ultimatum was a figment of my own imagination and creation.

54. I do not desire to stress the unpleasant nature of this interview. The hour was a critical one and Herr von Ribbentrop's excitability at such a moment was understandable. It seemed to me, however, that he was wilfully throwing away the last chance of a peaceful solution, and it was difficult to remain indifferent when faced with such a calamity. I would merely add that, contrary to what was subsequently published in the German press, I did not discuss a single detail of the German proposals with Herr von Ribbentrop, who flatly declined to do so. While it is true that they were read to me, it was in such a manner as to make them practically unintelligible.

55. I returned to His Majesty's Embassy that night with the feeling that the last hope for peace had vanished. I nevertheless saw the Polish Ambassador at 2 A.M., gave him a brief and studiously moderate account of my conversation with Herr von Ribbentrop, mentioned the cession of Danzig and the plebiscite in the Corridor as the two main points in the German proposals, stated that so far as I could gather they were not on the whole too unreasonable, and suggested to him that he might recommend to his Government that they should propose at once a meeting between Field-Marshals Smigly-Rydz and Göring. I felt obliged to add that I could not conceive of the success of any negotiations if they were conducted with Herr von Ribbentrop.

56. Though M. Lipski undertook to make this suggestion to his Government, it would by then probably have been in any case too late. There was, in fact, for Herr Hitler only one conceivable alternative to brute force, and that was that a Polish Plenipotentiary should humbly come to him, after the manner of Dr. Schuschnigg or President Hacha, and sign on the dotted line to the greater glory

of Adolf Hitler. And even that must happen at once. The Army was asking "Yes" or "No," since the success of its plans depended largely on the rapid occupation of Poland and the conclusion as soon as possible of the war on the Eastern front. Bad weather might otherwise intervene at any time and was likely to prove one of Poland's best defences against the highly mechanised German army. Moreover, a week had already been lost by Herr Hitler's hesitation on the 25th August.

57. I have no doubt that such and other considerations were present in Herr Hitler's mind on the night of the 30th August. I was consequently not surprised when I received in the early hours of the morning of the 31st reliable information that the actual decision had been taken to order the advance of the German Army by midday or 1 P.M. if no Polish Plenipotentiary had arrived before then. I believe this information to have been accurate, and I attribute the further brief respite which ensued to the twelfth-hour efforts of the Italian Government to restrain Herr Hitler from war.

58. I had in the meantime obtained from another source more definite, if unauthorised, details of the German proposals, and these I at once communicated through the Counsellor of His Majesty's Embassy to the Polish Ambassador, who spent that morning on the telephone to Warsaw. About the middle of the day I had transmitted to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs a further message from His Majesty's Government to the German Government notifying them that the Polish Government were taking steps to establish contact with them through the Polish Ambassador at Berlin, and asking them to agree to an immediate provisional *modus vivendi* at Danzig, for which purpose M. Burckhardt was suggested as intermediary. To this communication I never received any reply. There was, however, a further delay of some 12 hours. The Polish Government had authorised their Ambassador to establish contact with Herr von Ribbentrop, and Herr Hitler waited to see what message M. Lipski would bring. The question, in fact, was whether his qualifications would be those of a Plenipotentiary empowered by the Polish Government to conduct and conclude negotiations or not. On no other terms was Hitler prepared to postpone action. His army was ready and Poland must be taught a lesson. She must crawl or get her whipping.

59. During the day there had been much activity on the part of Field-Marshal Göring. I think there can be no doubt that Field-Marshal Göring himself would have preferred a peaceful solution, but in matters such as these it was Herr Hitler's decision which alone counted: and whatever Field-Marshal Göring himself might feel, he was merely the loyal and submissive servant of his master. Moreover, he had come down definitely on the side of peace a year before and it may have been difficult for him to adopt this course a second time. He invited me, however, to come and see him that

afternoon, and I did so at 5 p.m. in company of Sir G. Ogilvie-Forbes. Inasmuch as I had heard that the text of the proposals which Herr von Ribbentrop had refused to give me was to be announced that evening, my first remark was to point out to the Field-Marshal that this procedure would probably and finally wreck the last prospect of peace and to beg him to do his utmost to prevent their publication. Field-Marshal Göring's reply was that he could not intervene, and that the German Government felt obliged to broadcast their proposals to the world in order to prove their "good faith."

60. Instead he talked for the best part of two hours of the iniquities of the Poles and about Herr Hitler's and his own desire for friendship with England, and of the benefit to the world in general and the advantage to England in particular of such a friendship. It was a conversation which led nowhere and I could not help feeling that his remarks, which from his point of view were perfectly genuine but which I had heard often before, were chiefly intended for the edification of his listeners. I augured the worst from the fact that he was in a position at such a moment to give me so much of his time. He had a few days before been made president of the new German Defence Council for the Reich (or War Cabinet) and he could scarcely have afforded at such a moment to spare time in conversation if it did not mean that everything down to the last detail was now ready for action.

61. Incidentally the composition of that council was evidence of Herr Hitler's acumen. He had selected for it all the most respectable of the Nazi leaders, such as Herr Frick, Dr. Lammers, Dr. Funk, who might be counted upon, with Field-Marshal Göring himself the most popular of them all with the general public, to inspire the confidence of the German people. The worst extremists and the most unpopular with the people were omitted from it. To them was to be confided the less enviable task of dealing with the neutrals, of organising the Interior and of ruthlessly repressing any internal discontent. My general impression of this last talk with Field-Marshal Göring was, in fact, that it constituted a final but forlorn effort on his part to detach Britain from the Poles. Nevertheless the Field-Marshal seemed sincere when, having been called to the telephone, he returned to tell us that M. Lipski was on his way to see Herr von Ribbentrop. He seemed to hope that, provided contact was only established, war might after all prove unnecessary. The meeting between the Polish Ambassador proved, however, quite futile. M. Lipski stated that he was acting solely in his capacity as an Ambassador without plenary powers to discuss or to negotiate, and handed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs a brief communication to the effect that the Polish Government were weighing favourably the proposal of His Majesty's Government for direct discussion and that a formal answer in this matter would be communicated to the German Government in the immediate future.

He did not ask for the German proposals and Herr von Ribbentrop did not offer to give them to him. Their meeting lasted but a few minutes.

62. Early in the morning I had rung up the State Secretary and, after pointing out that the German Government had promised to communicate these proposals to His Majesty's Government, and how helpless I was without the authorised text of them, had asked him to suggest to Herr von Ribbentrop once more that they should be communicated to me. I heard no more from Baron von Weizsäcker until late in the evening, when I received a message asking me to call upon him at 9.15 P.M. Similar messages had been sent to the French Ambassador and to the United States Chargé d'Affaires, giving them appointments for 9.30 and 9.45 respectively. I accordingly called on Baron von Weizsäcker at the hour named and received from him the text of the proposals, together with an explanatory statement.⁽⁷⁾ As both these documents had already been broadcast at 9 P.M. I asked the Secretary of State what was the point now of making these communications to me. Baron von Weizsäcker observed that he was merely carrying out his instructions and that he could make no further statement to me. I could only infer from this reply that Herr Hitler had taken his final decision. I accordingly drafted that night a telegram to your Lordship to the effect that it would be quite useless for me to make any further suggestions since they would now only be outstripped by events and that the only course remaining to us was to show our inflexible determination to resist force by force.

63. In point of fact the advance into Poland had been ordered that night, and in the early hours of the 1st September without any declaration of war the German army crossed the frontier and the German Air Force proceeded to bomb the Polish aerodromes and lines of communications.

64. In accordance with Herr Hitler's usual technique everything was done by the German authorities to prove to the German public that it was the Poles who had been the aggressors instead of the aggressed. Cynical notices were communicated at 6 A.M. to His Majesty's Embassy notifying me that the Bay of Danzig was closed both to navigation and to flying in view of the possibility of military operations "against hostile attacks by Polish naval forces or by Polish aircraft." Field-Marshal Göring also sent me a message to say that the Poles had begun the war by blowing up the bridge across the Vistula at Dirchau, while Herr Hitler himself issued a proclamation to the German army, declaring that the Polish State had refused the settlement which he offered and had appealed to arms, that the Germans in Poland were being persecuted by a bloody terror, and that the Poles were no longer willing to respect the frontier of the German Reich. Every German newspaper repeated the lie that it

was the Poles who had begun the fighting. Finally at 10.30 A.M. Herr Hitler met the Reichstag which had been summoned for that hour, and similarly announced to the assembled Delegates that he had been "forced to take up arms in defence of the Reich." The die had in fact been cast and never can there have been or ever be a case of more deliberate and carefully planned aggression.

65. Late that evening I was instructed by your Lordship to notify the German Government that the latter by their action had created conditions which called for the implementation by the Governments of the United Kingdom and France of their undertaking to come to Poland's assistance, and that, unless His Majesty's Government received satisfactory assurances that the German Government had suspended all aggressive action and would be prepared to withdraw its forces from Polish territory, His Majesty's Government would, without hesitation, fulfil their obligations to Poland. I was instructed at the same time to request an immediate reply, and was authorised, if asked, to explain that this communication was in the nature of a warning, and was not to be considered as an ultimatum.

66. I handed this communication in writing to the Minister for Foreign Affairs at 9.30 P.M. that evening. Herr von Ribbentrop received it without other comment than that the sole blame rested on the Poles, that it was they who had first mobilised and who had first invaded Germany with troops of the regular army. He made no enquiry as to the nature of the communication which he merely said that he must submit to the Führer. I said that I realised that this would be necessary, and that I would be available at whatever hour he might be in a position to give me the Reichschancel'or's reply. The French Ambassador, who had been instructed to make a similar communication, did so immediately after me and received a reply on the same lines.

67. Earlier in the afternoon of that day, in accordance with your Lordship's instructions, I had officially requested the United States Chargé d'Affaires to be good enough to take charge of British interests in the event of war. All cyphers and confidential documents were burnt, and the whole of the Staff left their normal residences and were concentrated in the Adlon Hotel next door or in the Embassy itself. All the arrangements were carried out with a maximum of efficiency and a minimum of confusion, which did the utmost credit to the organisation and competency of the very excellent Staff of His Majesty's Embassy. The chief responsibility for this rested upon Mr. Holman, as Head of the Chancery.

68. The 2nd September was a day of suspense. The Poles were, it was reported, putting up a brave resistance in the face of surprise and overwhelming numbers, and in spite of the vast superiority of the German air force and mechanised forces. No reply was received from the German Government throughout the day to the British and French warnings.

69. On the other hand, the Italian Government was making one more effort to save the situation. The Italian Ambassador had come to see me at midday on his way to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Signor Attolico told me that he must know one thing immediately. Was the communication which I had made the previous evening to Herr von Ribbentrop an ultimatum or not? I told his Excellency that I had been authorised to tell the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he had asked me—which he had not done—that it was not an ultimatum but a warning. I mentioned to Signor Attolico that I understood that the Italian Government had put forward a suggestion for the cessation of hostilities and the immediate summoning of a conference of the interested Powers. In this connection I said that I felt bound to express the opinion that such a proposal would never be entertained unless at the same time all the German troops were withdrawn from Polish territory.

70. The Ambassador retorted that I could not speak for my Government. I admitted that fact, but said that I could not imagine the possibility of ourselves, and much less of the Poles, agreeing to any lesser course. I do not know what reply, if any, was given by the German Government to this proposal. But I should like to put on record here that no one ever worked harder for peace than did Signor Attolico not only this year but last year also. He was entirely selfless in this his earnest endeavour.

71. There were, in fact, for Herr Hitler only two solutions: the use of force, or the achievement of his aims by the display of force. "If you wish to obtain your objective by force, you must be strong; if you wish to obtain them by negotiation, you must be stronger still." That was a remark which he made to a foreign Statesman who visited him this year, and it expresses in the concisest possible form the Hitler technique. It was exactly that which he displayed in September 1938. He was no more bluffing then than he was bluffing in August 1939. Up to the middle of August this year the fear of a war on two fronts, with Russia hostile or at least unfriendly, might possibly have deterred him and his military advisers from action against Poland. There was no Eastern front to give him cause for hesitation in 1938, and he could have counted then on Hungarian as well as Polish support in his nefarious plans for the dismemberment of Czecho-Slovakia. But for Munich he would without a shadow of doubt have invaded that country on the 29th September last year, just as surely as he invaded Poland on the 1st September this year, and the war would have come eleven months earlier. In both cases the methods employed were identical: the gradual mobilisation of the German army over a period of months and its secret concentration at the appointed positions, whence the advance could begin at almost any moment and within a very few hours.

72. So it was again in 1939. If he could have secured his objectives by this display of force he might have been content for the moment, with all the additional prestige which another bloodless

success would have procured for him with his own people. But it would only have been to start again once the world had recovered from the shock, and even his own people were beginning to be tired of these repeated crises. Millions of Germans had begun to long for a more peaceful existence. Guns instead of butter were becoming more and more unpopular except with the younger generation, and Hitler may well have wondered what might happen to his Nazi revolution if its momentum were allowed to stop. Moreover the financial and economic position of Germany was such that things could scarcely continue as they were without some form of explosion, internal or external. Of the two alternatives the most attractive from the point of view of his growing personal ambitions, and those of the clique which was nearest to him, was war.

73. It is scarcely credible that he would have acted as he did if bloody war, rather than a bloodless victory, had not seemed the fairer prospect for him. He had always meant to teach the Poles a lesson for what he regarded as their base ingratitude in refusing the "generous" demands which he had made to them in March. His only manœuvres since that date were with the object of creating circumstances favourable to his plans or of inducing Britain and France to abandon their Polish ally and to leave him a free hand in Central and Eastern Europe.

74. To this end, encouraged by Herr von Ribbentrop, who apparently advised him up to the last moment that Britain would not fight, he worked unceasingly. In the course of one of the five interviews which I had with him during those last few days, I remarked to him that it was he who was ungenerous to the Poles, in view of the advantages which his treaty of 1934 with Pilsudski had brought him. Herr Hitler denied that that treaty had ever been of any benefit to Germany and asserted that it had merely been unpopular with the Germans. It was a remark which was typical of Herr Hitler's capacity to ignore everything which he might have said, promised or done in the past as soon as it had become contrary to views for the present or the future.

75. One of Herr Hitler's greatest drawbacks is that, except for two official visits to Italy, he has never travelled abroad. For his knowledge of British mentality he consequently relied on Herr von Ribbentrop as an ex-Ambassador to Britain, who spoke both French and English, and who had spent some years in Canada, and whom he regarded as a man of the world. If report be true Herr von Ribbentrop gave him consistently false counsels in regard to England, while his successes in other spheres induced Herr Hitler to regard him more and more as a second Bismarck, a conviction which Herr von Ribbentrop probably shared to the full.

76. Even the most absolute Dictator is susceptible to the influence of his surroundings. Nevertheless Herr Hitler's decisions, his calculations, and his opportunisms were his own. As Field-

Marshal Göring once said to me, "when a decision has to be taken, none of us count more than the stones on which we are standing. It is the Führer alone who decides." If anything did count, it was the opinion of his Military Advisers. I have always believed that it was they who, in the interests of Germany's strategical security, recommended the establishment of the Protectorate over Bohemia. And again this August, it was they, I fancy, who told Herr Hitler that further delay would be fatal lest the seasonal bad weather in Poland might upset their calculations for her swift overthrow. The army grudged him even the week between the 25th August and the 1st September which his last attempt to secure British neutrality or at least goodwill had cost it.

77. Yet even so the advice of his soldiers was probably merely cover for the prosecution of Hitler's own plans. His impatience and precipitate action on that last day of August can scarcely have been other than premeditated. All through the summer he had been waiting on events to turn in his favour and had been making his preparations to seize the opportunity, when it was offered to him. The Russian pact appeared to give him the advantage which he was seeking and thereafter there was no time to lose, if mud was not to be added to Poland's allies.

78. When therefore the Polish Government delayed 48 hours in sending its Plenipotentiary to beg for terms at Berlin and even then sent only an Ambassador without plenary powers, Herr Hitler in spite of the expressed readiness of Poland to enter into direct negotiations, finally made up his mind not to keep his army waiting any longer. The order for the advance into Poland was probably given immediately after M. Lipski's interview with Herr von Ribbentrop at 6.30 P.M. on the 31st August.

79. Late in the afternoon of the 2nd September I communicated to the Secretary of State for the information of the German Government the verbatim report of the Prime Minister's speech in the House of Commons on that date. Therein Mr. Chamberlain stated that while His Majesty's Government could not agree to the proposal of the Italian Government for a conference while Poland was being subjected to invasion, they would be willing, if the German forces were withdrawn from Polish territory, to regard the position as being the same as before the forces had crossed the frontier. It was the last chance of avoiding the great catastrophe of war at the last minute, but the German Government remained silent.

80. In the early hours (4 A.M.) of the 3rd September I was accordingly instructed by your Lordship to arrange for a meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs at 9 A.M. There was some difficulty in establishing contact with the Ministry at that hour, but I was finally informed that Dr. Schmidt was authorised by the Minister to accept on his Excellency's behalf any communication

which I might make to him. I accordingly handed to Dr. Schmidt at 9 A.M. precisely the final ultimatum from His Majesty's Government, pointing out that over 24 hours had elapsed since I had requested an immediate answer to our warning communication of the 1st September, that since then the attacks on Poland had been intensified, and that, unless satisfactory assurances were received by His Majesty's Government before 11 A.M. British summer time of the suspension of all aggressive action against Poland and of the withdrawal of the German forces from that country, a state of war would exist between our two countries as from that hour.

81. Dr. Schmidt received this communication and undertook to deliver it immediately to his Chief. As no reply from the German Government was vouchsafed by 11 A.M., the German Representative in London was informed in due course at that hour that a state of war existed between Britain and Germany. By 10 minutes past 11 A.M. every British consular officer in Germany had been advised by the staff of His Majesty's Embassy at Berlin that this was the case.

82. Shortly after 11 A.M. I received a final message from Herr von Ribbentrop asking me to call upon him at once. I did so at 11.30 and he handed me this time a lengthy document to read, beginning with a refusal on the part of the German people to accept any demands in the nature of an ultimatum made by the British Government, and stating that any aggressive action by England would be answered with the same weapons and the same form. The rest of the document was pure propaganda with a view to attempting to prove to the German people and the world generally that it was Britain alone who was to blame for everything which had happened. My only comment on reading this completely false representation of events was: "It would be left to history to judge where the blame really lay." Herr von Ribbentrop's answer was to the effect that history had already proved the facts, and that nobody had striven harder for peace and good relations with England than Herr Hitler himself. His last remark to me was that he wished me personally good, to which I could only reply that I deeply regretted the failure of all my efforts for peace, but that I bore no grudge against the German people. Thereafter I saw no further German official except the member of the Protocol, who accompanied our special train as far as Rotterdam. My last official communication to the German Government was a note which I presented on the instructions of His Majesty's Government enquiring whether the German Government would observe the provisions of the Geneva Protocol of 1925 prohibiting the use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases and of bacteriological methods of warfare—I understand that the German Government have since replied through the Swiss Minister in London giving the required assurance on the understanding that His Majesty's Government would similarly observe the provisions of the Protocol.

83. The French Ambassador had presented at noon a similar ultimatum to the German Government to expire at 5 p.m. For a few hours after 11 a.m. the telephonic lines of His Majesty's Embassy at Berlin continued to function, but about 4 p.m. all telephonic lines were cut off and both the Staff at the Adlon Hotel and the Embassy itself was isolated from all external contact. Members of my staff, however, had visited the Protocol at 11 a.m. with a view to arranging for our departure. They were treated with every civility and consideration and were informed that a special train would be placed at our disposal the following morning.

84. Our only contact thereafter with the outside world was through the American Embassy. Its aid and help was invaluable. No trouble was too great for the Chargé d'Affaires, Mr. Alexander Kirk, and the members of his staff. They did everything that was possible to smooth over the difficulties of those last 24 hours, and our pleasantest recollection of them is our appreciation of the great sympathy and willing assistance which we received from the American Embassy.

85. The French Embassy left Berlin at 9 a.m. the following morning, Monday, the 4th September. The British Embassy followed in a special train, leaving the Charlottenberg station at 11.20 a.m. The whole party consisted of 80 men, 7 women and 2 dogs. A small crowd collected round the Embassy before our departure, but unlike 1914 it evinced no single sign of hostility. Mr. Kirk rendered me one more last service by driving me to the station in his own car. The streets of Berlin were practically deserted and there was nothing to indicate the beginning of a war which is to decide whether force is to be the sole arbiter in international affairs; whether international instruments solemnly and freely entered into are to be modified, not by negotiation, but by mere unilateral repudiation; whether there is to be any faith in future in written contracts; whether the fate of a great nation and the peace of the world is to rest in the future in the hands of one man; whether small nations are to have any rights against the pretensions of States more powerful than themselves; in a word, whether government of the people by the people for the people is to continue in this world, or whether it is to be replaced by the arbitrary will and ambition of single individuals regardless of the peoples' will.

86. Our journey through Germany, if prolonged, was uneventful. At the various stations at which we stopped there was some curiosity but no evidence of hostility. We reached Rheine, a small station some 20 kilom. from the German frontier, at about 6 p.m. on the Monday evening. There our train was detained for nearly twenty hours pending the safe arrival in Dutch territorial waters of the German mission from London. We eventually left Rheine at 1.30 p.m. on Tuesday and were received with great hospitality at

the Dutch frontier. We reached Rotterdam that evening, and after spending a night at The Hague and one on board the Dutch steamer *Batavier V*, left Rotterdam in the early hours of Thursday morning, the 6th September. We arrived at Gravesend about 6 p.m. that evening.

I have, &c.

NEVILE HENDERSON.
